

From: Ann Evans
To: Microsoft ATR
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Subject: Microsoft Monopoly

I am a home user of Microsoft Windows operating systems. Working with these systems can be a nightmare, even for those of us who have been using computers for about 25 years.

We recently purchased a new piece of hardware for our home network. We got an antenna that hooks us to an ethernet card for high speed wireless internet access. Living in a rural area, our choices broadband choices were limited. The hardware installation went without a hitch, but the installation and configuration of the drivers and software have been a week long nightmare.

We were using one of Microsoft's "home" versions of operating systems. It baffles me why Microsoft seems to think that a home user would somehow need less of an operating system than a business would, especially since businesses have support people available to help when problems arise. The Windows ME we have been using for about a year and a half of frustration and dreaded blue screens, hung up and destabilized during the installation of the network software. During the time we have used this system software, it has been a struggle to install even the simplest program on the computer and get it working- much less keep it working. This time, not only was the system unable to install the new software, but it became unable to manage normal operation. (This same software later installed without any problems on the professional Windows 2000 system)

The system became so corrupted that we were completely unable to restore it from the original, licensed installation disk. I went to the OfficeMax to purchase a better operating system, Windows 2000. The young man at the store insisted that even though the box clearly stated that the version I was buying would upgrade from Windows 98, it would not do so, but would only upgrade from Windows NT. I pointed out to him that if necessary I could format my hard drive and reinstall Windows 98, if it wouldn't work with Windows ME. He insisted that I should continue to use the Windows ME, until the hardware drivers I required became available for Windows XP home version. That was out of the question, since it was non-functional, and couldn't be repaired by its original disk.

He insisted that I had no business purchasing the Windows 2000 software, because it was designed for business, not home use. Apparently he had been trained to believe that home users are not entitled to stable and secure operating systems. He made his judgment of what I needed for my computer not by asking me how I use my computer, but by looking at me and determining that I am a middle aged woman.

When I mentioned that I might format the hard drive, he began a speech about how that would be horribly expensive and require the installation of a new motherboard. Clearly this was a misconception (big fat lie) on his part, which I pointed out to him. Reformatting and rebuilding a computer from scratch is tedious, but does not require a new motherboard. After all, my husband had found it necessary to do this procedure three times since we "upgraded" from Windows 98 to the software that Microsoft felt would be "good enough" for home users. Formatting erases all information on the hard drive, including system, programs and files. We have lost our work, many hours of our time required to reinstall and configure every program we have, and have also lost program upgrades that proved to be no longer available at the time we had to format, requiring the purchase of new software to replace a perfectly good program. I have used Macintosh computers and system software for 15 years without going through all this even once.

I feel that my family has been harmed by the monopolistic hold that Microsoft has on the computer industry because for all practical purposes, our choice of operating systems has been limited to one company's product, which has proven, at least in the "home" versions, to have been a shoddy piece of work engendering anger and frustration whenever we try to use it. Many software functions, especially in regard to internet and networking use, are only available for Windows computers - the programmers simply don't write versions for other operating systems.

We have been victimized by this company which has made its own decisions about our needs without consulting us, and then has trained technicians all over the country to force these inferior and non-functional products upon us, and to "baffle us with you-know-what" in the process.

I am a very experienced user, and was able to stand my ground with the young technician, though I had to become loud and obnoxious before he was willing to <allow> me to purchase the Windows 2000 product, which I did as he grumbled away. I was not interested in any more inferior "home" versions of this software, and I was very much aware of when he crossed over the line of giving an honest opinion. Another person, less experienced than I, could easily have fallen for this Microsoft-trained jerk's confabulations, and could have ended up forking over a large sum of money to fix a problem that was entirely caused by the slap dash quality of the system software that Microsoft has determined was ready for release to the "home" user.

Not only has Microsoft put a strangle hold on the software industry itself, but it is also well on its way to putting that same vise like grip over everyone who uses their product by means of its proprietary training programs, which include, in my experience, training in the same patronizing and demeaning attitude that this young man displayed. Just

because a person is able to pass a test based on rote memorization does not mean that they have any particular ability to make computers function properly, and from what I have experienced, they are quite likely to inflate their income by fixing things that are not broken, or by randomly installing parts until they accidentally replace what was broken - while not really ever understanding what went wrong.

In addition to that, there were no clear instructions anywhere on the Microsoft website, nor in the help files about how to configure the Windows software to work with this network arrangement- which was not a particularly complicated one. I was finally able to find instructions at a website called <http://www.annoyances.org> - which is a revealing choice of titles, I think.

I would point out that if I had suffered this much trouble with a brand of car - I would buy a different brand, wouldn't I? I would have that choice, wouldn't I? If a car manufacturer trained its service people to be universally rude and demeaning, one would simply deal with a different manufacturer, right?

Apple Computer, as a sharp contrast, has only one set of system software - both for home and for business use. The newest system, OS X, only costs \$120 for the full professional version. Windows 2000 cost me \$199 for the upgrade version. The full version was \$269. There is no possible way that Windows 2000 is worth almost three times as much as an operating system than OS X.

Only in an atmosphere of monopoly could this company inflate its prices to three times that of its competitors, sell a crushingly inferior product, and not be beat to the ground by the normal forces of fair competition.

I hope that the Department of Justice will examine the business tactics of Microsoft very closely - not only as they take advantage of their competitors, but also in how they use their monopolistic position to take advantage of their customer base as well. In a fair, competitive market, I should have had the choice to use someone else's product if I was unhappy with Microsoft's work, shouldn't I? In reality, there is no choice.

Sincerely,
Ann Evans
Citizen and Voter